

Feeding the Lowcountry

“Our goal is to have no hungry person within a five-mile radius of a service area,” says Jermaine Husser, chief operating officer of the Lowcountry Food Bank. Operating under the umbrella of America’s Second Harvest, the Lowcountry Food Bank’s main distribution center is housed in a 37,000-square-foot warehouse located on the former base.

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Since the Lowcountry Food Bank addressed the needs of homelessness, it was offered a lease in the spirit of the McKinney Act. Therefore, the Charleston Naval Complex Redevelopment Authority (RDA) offered the Lowcountry Food Bank a five-year, rent-free lease. After an initial investment of \$225,000 to build offices on the site, the Lowcountry Food Bank moved into the new facilities tripling in size.

According to Husser, the Lowcountry Food Bank has experienced phenomenal growth. “We had the second largest percentage of growth in distribution among food banks in the country with an increase of 1,044 percent while distributing 9.7 million pounds of food in 2002.” With two additional branches in Beaufort and Horry counties, this non-profit organization continues to distribute food to more than 400 member agencies, including churches, synagogues, homeless shelters, daycare centers, soup kitchens, orphanages, healthcare agencies, senior homes and children’s programs.

In addition to working with member agencies, the Lowcountry Food Bank’s Kid’s Café program feeds more than 1,000 hungry children in the coastal counties of South Carolina. Along with providing nutritionally balanced meals, the Kids Café program offers academic assistance to needy children and youth in an environment that is safe, accessible and convenient.

Assisting over 1,300 senior citizens on a monthly basis, the Lowcountry Food Bank also seeks to find pockets of “hidden” hunger. “Many elderly people are on fixed incomes and all their money is spent on medication. They really need our help,” says Husser.

Executive Director Archie McRee said, “We continue to increase our overall food supply and to tailor our programs to the needs of the community in the fight against hunger.” In fact, the majority of the Lowcountry Food Bank’s clients are working parents trying to support their families, senior citizens unable to pay for the rising cost of food and children living below the poverty level. According to the recent U.S. Conference of Mayor’s report, nearly 70 percent of all individuals requesting emergency food assistance in the Charleston area are the working poor.

Realizing the power of this statistic, the Charleston area has pulled together to provide



Robert Wilson and Travis Green unload cases of USDA food that will be distributed throughout the Lowcountry.





Jermaine Husser
Chief Operating Officer
Lowcountry Food Bank

both volunteer and financial resources for the Lowcountry Food Bank. Each month, more than 1,000 volunteer hours are logged. Major grocery store supporters include Bi-Lo, Harris Teeter, Piggly Wiggly and Publix.

In addition to thousands of individual donations, foundation grants and corporate gifts, the Lowcountry Food Bank receives over \$50,000 each year from its annual fundraising event known as Chefs' Feast. Aimed at preventing childhood hunger, Chefs' Feast was created by world-renown Charleston chef, Robert Carter of the Peninsula Grill. Along with other prominent chefs from the Charleston area, Carter cooks up an array of specialties that satisfies the most voracious appetites. All proceeds benefit the Lowcountry Food Bank's Kid's Café program. "It is an awesome fundraiser for the food bank. We are really blessed to have these caring people in Charleston," says Husser.



The McKinney Act

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (The McKinney Act) was the first and remains the only major federal legislative response to homelessness. In 1983, the first federal task force on homelessness was created to provide information to localities on how to obtain surplus federal property. As advocates for the homeless demanded a response from the federal government, the Homeless Persons' Survival Act was introduced in Congress in 1986. The act contained emergency relief measures, preventive actions and long-term solutions to homelessness. However, only small portions of the proposal were enacted into law.

In late 1986, the Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, which provided shelter, food, mobile healthcare and transitional housing was introduced to Congress and passed in 1987. The bill was signed into law on July 22, 1987. After the death of its chief sponsor, Representative Stewart B. McKinney of Connecticut, the act was renamed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act.

In relation to military base closures, Title V of the act originally required redevelopment authorities to identify and make available buildings on closed bases that could house and assist homeless people. On October 7, 1994, Congress passed a measure that added an exemption for military bases from the 1987 McKinney Act. Instead, redevelopment authorities must submit reuse plans to the Department of Housing and Urban Development indicating efforts to assist homeless advocates, taking into account both economic factors and homeless needs. ^{MW}

